



SALAD GREENS

Health Benefits

♦ Dark green salad greens are an excellent source of vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin K, and folate.

♦ Vitamin K helps stop cuts and scrapes from bleeding too much and starts the healing process.

Fun Facts

♦ Americans eat about 30 pounds of lettuce every year.

♦ Green pigments found in vegetables can be used to create a phenomenon called “fluorescence,” which is essentially the same phenomenon as neon light.

♦ After Popeye made his debut on January 17, 1929, spinach became the third most popular children’s food after turkey and ice cream.

Home Grown History

A large variety of salad greens are grown in Wisconsin. Commonly seen greens include spinach, Swiss chard, and many types of lettuce. Additionally, specialty salad green crops such as arugula, dandelion, and kale also are grown.



Spinach – Spinach originated near present day Iran. By the 7th century, it had made its way to China thanks to the king of Nepal who sent it as a gift. Spinach was introduced to Europe by the Moors when they invaded Spain in the 11th century. Spinach was planted in the U.S. in the early 19th century but didn’t become popular until the 20th century when Popeye the Sailor Man, a well loved cartoon, made his appearance in the 1930’s. Popeye gained incredible strength by eating canned spinach.

Lettuce – Lettuce originated in or around the Mediterranean basin. Wild forms of lettuce in Egyptian tomb paintings and written accounts of lettuce that date back to 79 A.D. all support the belief that salad greens are one of the oldest known vegetables. Lettuce was among the first vegetables brought to the New World by Christopher Columbus and continues to be grown across North America today. Lettuce varieties range in size, shape, and color. There are four main types of lettuce commonly grown in the Midwest: crisphead, butterhead, romaine, and leaf.

Swiss chard – Swiss chard is also native to the Mediterranean region. Chard is actually a member of the beet family. However, it is grown for its large, crinkled leaves and fleshy stalks. Chard is one of the most beautiful vegetables. It has large green or red leaves and stalks of red, orange, white, and yellow. Swiss chard is one of the few greens that thrives when exposed to high temperatures. As such, is one of the few salad greens grown during the heat of summer.

Student Activities

- ♦ Have students develop a campaign to promote the benefits of leafy green vegetable consumption.
- ♦ Partner with school nutrition staff and ask students to create and promote a new salad for the school menu.
- ♦ Ask small groups of students (3-5 students) to create a recipe for a nutritious snack that uses salad greens.
- ♦ Ask students to investigate why darker greens (e.g., spinach, romaine) are more nutritious than lighter green varieties (e.g., iceberg lettuce) and compare their nutrient content.

Growing Salad Greens in Wisconsin

Most salad greens are hardy, fast growing annuals that prefer cool weather. Therefore, seeds can be planted as early as 4 to 6 weeks before the average date of the last frost.

Lettuce seeds are sown thinly in rows or in wide-row bands about 18 inches to two feet apart to utilize space. Seeds are covered with no more than one-half inch of fine soil, which is kept moist for 10 to 14 days. About three to seven days after planting, lettuce emerges from the ground.

Seeds for salad crops are often very small. Once plants have sprouted they may need to be thinned out to allow the plants room to grow. This is especially true for all head varieties of lettuce. Head lettuce and Swiss chard should be thinned to one plant every 8-12 inches. Leaf lettuce (including spinach) can be thinned to leave only 1-2 inches between plants.

Successive crops can be sown every couple of weeks for continuous harvest throughout the summer and fall. It is important to thin out the plants to allow good air circulation between the plants and help prevent leaf diseases. Salad greens are harvested by hand. They are cut with a sharp knife near the base of the head and any damaged outer leaves are removed. Most salad greens can be cut when they are young and on to a point where they begin to lose their flavor. Some salad greens turn bitter if you harvest too late.

Beyond the Classroom

Have students visit the produce section of a grocery store and interview the produce manager. Report back to class how many different varieties of salad greens are available, the different ways they are sold (e.g., bagged, cut, salad bar), and the price for each variety?

For More Information:

WI Dept. of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection: http://datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Food/pdf/mk_fc_79web.pdf

Colorado State University Extension: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/foodnut/09373.html>

Classroom Cooking—Blueberry Spinach Salad

Makes 24 taste test servings (¼ cup)

Ingredients:

- 6 oz raw spinach, washed and drained
- 1 cup dried blueberries
- ¼ cup light balsamic vinaigrette
- Small paper plates and forks

Directions:

1. Toss spinach, blueberries, and vinaigrette in a bowl to mix well.
2. Serve immediately or chill for later use.



Exploring Wisconsin Salad Greens — Taste Test Activity

What You Will Need:

- 1 c each of washed salad greens per 3-4 students. Select different varieties such as romaine, spinach, chard, and green leaf.
- *Home Grown: Tastes of WI* resource guide
- Taste test survey, paper and pencils

Activity:

- Have students observe, touch, smell, and taste each sample and make notes describing the different tastes. Extend the activity in class by comparing and contrasting the varieties and making a graph showing the likes and dislikes of the class.

